

**Federal Communications Commission
National Congress of American Indians**

*6th Annual Dialogue on Improving Telecommunications Access
in Indian Country*

**FCC Headquarters
7th Floor South Conference Room**

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

**Remarks of
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell**

(as prepared for delivery)

I've had the opportunity to say hello to some of you individually, but let me be the first to greet you as a group, and thank you for joining in the 6th Annual Dialogue on Improving Telecommunications Access in Indian Country.

It was ten years ago this month that the Commission held, after consultation with Indian tribal leaders, a field hearing in Chandler, Arizona, entitled "Overcoming Obstacles to Telephone Service for Indians on Reservations."

One important outcome of this hearing – the second in a series – was a Commission policy statement affirming our “commitment to promote a government-to-government relationship between the FCC and federally-recognized Indian tribes.” This dialogue is an important part of our effort to fulfill that commitment.

The policy statement also reaffirmed principles of tribal sovereignty and the federal trust responsibility, and documented our commitment to certain goals and principles. I will focus on one particular goal highlighted in the policy statement – that of addressing “low penetration rates and poor quality services on reservations.”

In May 2008, the Commission adopted the cap on competitive eligible telecommunications carrier access to high-cost universal service support. While controlling the growth of the fund was important, I felt it critical that the Commission include an exception to that cap for all of the providers serving tribal lands across the country, and Alaska Native lands – some of the most under-served parts of America. This limited exception was designed to ensure that companies operating in these areas will continue to receive high-cost support to provide their services while we move toward a permanent reform of the Universal Service system.

My colleagues and I pledged last year to resolve questions regarding the implementation of this exception. I am pleased to inform you that we today adopted an order fulfilling that commitment.

This is a small step towards fulfillment of the goals outlined in the policy statement and our larger Universal Service goals, but an important one nonetheless. We obviously still have much to accomplish in this area, and I look forward to working with all of you, my colleagues here at the Commission, and other stakeholders to fulfill our commitments.

Thank you, and have a productive dialogue.